

OUR VOICE

**Cutting-edge tech at the landfill**

Catawba County officials are pursuing a landfill plan that could put the county on the cutting edge of waste utilization technology.

Landfills are rich in raw materials and thermal energy. The problem is turning those resources into manageable, productive technology. Landfills have been tapped for heat, but most waste technology focuses on recycling waste products before they reach the landfill.

Now, Catawba County is looking at creating an eco-complex at the Blackburn landfill. The project involves businesses using landfill resources for operation.

Several companies are committed to the project. They can utilize thermal energy, biosolids, treated discharge water, sawdust and wood waste, carbon dioxide, and other landfill products.

Appalachian State University intends to put a research center there to examine efficient use of biological byproducts, nitrogen, carbon dioxide and thermal energy. The university will study ways to apply landfill resources to agriculture and other uses.

If successful, the eco-complex will create new jobs and reduce landfill waste. In the short run, success could stabilize landfill rates. In the long run, the project may reduce the prospect of landfill expansion.

The idea is to save money, encourage economic growth and transform the landfill from a dump to a resource. The concept is not new, but has been successful only in limited applications.

If the county makes the eco-complex idea work, it will get a heap of attention and benefit a lot of people.